

The Use of Virtual Patients in Undergraduate Thyroid Pathology Training

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Abstract

Background and Aim: The COVID-19 pandemic changed how medical teaching and learning is done around the world. The medical schools were forced to adopt and implement different online instruments to cope with the specific of life sciences education. Virtual patients are one of those instruments. *Materials and Methods:* To study the usefulness and opportunity of using virtual patients as an additional tool in medical education, a virtual patient was implemented using a free online form-builder starting from a clinical scenario centered on thyroid pathology. Using a snowball constructed sample, we asked medical students from the Faculty of Medicine to solve the virtual patient and evaluate this educational method's utility. *Results:* The implementation of the virtual patient was a success; the virtual patient was available for use in less than two months since the start of the implementation. In one week, it was solved by 171 students from all the study years. The students' general opinion was that this is a useful educational method in medical education and the University should invest more in developing a database containing such virtual patients on different pathologies. *Conclusions:* Using this virtual patient, we demonstrated that this educational method could be implemented with minimal costs in internet infrastructure. The students receive the virtual patients well, and their perception is that the use of virtual patients helps them develop clinical skills that are essential in medical practice.

Keywords: Virtual patients; Medical education; Developing clinical skills